

# Attention To Detail Keeps Family Farm Strong

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**UNION BRIDGE, Md.**—"How many of you live within a couple miles of development?" The question was asked of participants at the Pennsylvania Dairy Princess seminar.

Says Maryland princess Christina Harper, "Every hand went up. Every issue comes down to, we need to educate the public."

It's clear that this capable, articulate young lady will be an enthusiastic representative for the industry.

"It's traditional to speak to farm groups, but I'd like to do some new things, too. I'd like to address any group that's interested in having me come speak with them."

It's easy to see where Christina Harper, Maryland's new dairy Princess, gets her enthusiastic love of farm life. A visit to Otterdale View farm, the beauty spot near Union Bridge where the recently crowned Princess lives with her family, shows that agricultural roots run deep for this young lady.

Parents Bill and Jean Coshun farm 200 acres that belonged to Bill's grandfather, Joseph. Bill's father, also called Bill, worked the farm in turn. The elder Mr. Coshun still helps out when needed. All field work is done by Bill and his wife. Christina helps with the milking, cares for the calves and heifers, and pitches in wherever she is needed on the 50 cow dairy. She credits her parents with enabling her to pursue the

dairy princess title by relieving her of her chores at certain times. Christina has an older brother, not involved in the farm. The darling of the family is baby Joseph, six months old.

Facilities on the farm include a double four herringbone parlor installed in 1971. Up until that time the farm was beef and chickens. Bill utilizes a chalkboard mounted on the parlor wall to note which cows need bred, which might be medicated (those cows are also clearly marked with orange paint), and which are dry. There is also a "check" column for the vet. Another management aid in the barn is a large breeding wheel with each cow's number on it. Pinpointing each and every cow's status down to the day, whether bred or just freshened, proves invaluable in the breeding program.

"It's nice to get a cow bred by three months," says Bill, "that way you can stick with a 12 month cycle. The longer she goes, the less money you're going to get out of the cow."

It is this attention to detail that has helped this family farm stay viable in the face of all the challenges confronting smaller operations. Coshun and his family look at the bottom line when making management decisions. Any input must justify the money spent on it by returning a profit to the farm.

Cows used to be fed in the parlor, but they got in the habit of pushing each other around, and not wanting to exit, so that practice

was discontinued. Now they line up at a trough running the better part of the barnyard. A stationary mixer at the base of the 20 by 60 concrete stave silo mixes the TMR, then it is paddled out into the trough. Two 2500-bushel capacity corn cribs provide storage on the farm: one for corn, one modified to hold small grains.

Manure is pushed off the concrete pad in the barnyard once a day into a 23 by 42 Slurrystore. It is pumped out twice a year.

The majority of the Otterdale View Holsteins are grade, although there are some registered cows in the herd. This, once again, helps keep costs down. The grade cows don't require a lot of money to be tied up in pedigrees, and since the farm is not in the business of marketing cows, this adds to the bottom line. Christina has three Brown Swiss cows of her own in the milking string, and also owns one Swiss heifer. One of her cows, Cookie, will participate in the MD Brown Swiss Futurity at the State fair.

The herd is not on test. Bill estimates herd average to be around 18,000 pounds. "We don't have the highest production, we're not pushing for it." He adds, "And we don't have any DHIA records to meet."

Adds Christina, "They don't do as well when we push them."

Two people can milk the herd in one hour and forty-five minutes. A chlorhexidine teat dip is used pre and post milking. Starting last summer, the cows have been kept inside under fans during the heat of the day, and turned out at night when temperatures drop. Bill says it also gives them a chance to get off the concrete. Christina cites the "...good wearability of feet and legs on concrete." as one advantage she sees in the Brown Swiss.

"We pick our corn here," says Bill. That way they save the cost of having someone come and combine it. "It's all a tradeoff, because we can't pick too many acres of corn. We're a small farm, we only have access to ourselves. One of the things that makes a small farm work and able to compete with bigger farms is that we can handle some things more efficiently." Sixty-five acres are planted in corn.

Fifty-one acres of soybeans are grown. A portable roaster is brought in from Pennsylvania, and the soybeans are roasted before being stored in a converted 2500 bushel capacity corncrib. Yields average 50 bushels per acre. Bill is working with a nutritionist from Glade Valley Feed and Supply

who helps balance the ration and tests forages. About 35 acres of hay are grown. Storage facilities favor square bales, although some hay is made in big round bales, and some also goes for haylage.

Another facet of the farm is the 28 acres of choose-and-cut Christmas trees planted in what was once meadow. For only \$15, the public can experience the beauty of the farm at Christmas time as they come cut their own trees. Otterdale View is also the largest producer of Christmas wreaths in Carroll County, selling wholesale as well as direct marketing from the farm.

"I would like to see dairy farmers setting an example and drinking their milk, especially in public. Little things like that help," says the resident dairy princess.

She offers this insight into her role, "A lot of the controversial issues that farmers have to deal with now all come down to consumers and the public being uneducated about the dairy industry, they don't understand it. I think that it's my job as dairy princess to educate. We can all try to educate people, especially on environmental issues. We want people to understand that we're stewards of the land."



Christina's chores include calf and heifer care, as well as milking.



"Cookie" will participate in the Brown Swiss Futurity at the State fair this year. Says Christina of her cow, "She has an 'automatic' takeoff, when she wants to get off, she takes it off!" The cow had pneumonia as a calf, which stunted her growth, according to the vet. Though she's small in size, her conformation is real correct, says this 4-H dairy judging team member.



Bill and Jean Coshun, Christina, and baby Joseph enjoy the shade this porch provides from the hot summer sun. The family built their log home on the farm about four years ago.



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# HOMESTEAD NOTES